ROBERT MORRIS

CARL ANDRE

# MINIMALISM
## x 4

SOL LEWITT

DONALD JUDD

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# MINIMALISM
# x 4

AN EXHIBITION OF SCULPTURE FROM THE 1960s

**WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART, DOWNTOWN BRANCH**
AT FEDERAL HALL NATIONAL MEMORIAL, 26 WALL STREET

NOVEMBER 17 - DECEMBER 31, 1982

The work of the artists of the mid 1960s associated with the Minimalist movement shared certain characteristics: the elimination of illusionism and the hierarchical relationship of parts, and the reduction of complexity, detail, figure, and evidence of the artist's hand. In lieu of these traditional artistic practices the Minimalists stressed literalness, singular forms or modules, apparent simplicity, industrial fabrication and materials, non-referential forms, uninterrupted surfaces, and human scale.

*Minimalism x 4* demonstrates the common forms of the work which gave rise to the term Minimalism. Yet in retrospect the term proves too general to encompass the full range of the individual artists' works, goals, and theories. The reputation of each artist depends not on his adherence to a closed set of historically determined definitions or styles, but on the success or failure of his work on its own terms. The sculpture included in this exhibition manifests some of the most readily visible aspects of the Minimalist style, but it is not and could not be considered an anthology.

Neither Carl Andre, Donald Judd, Sol LeWitt, nor Robert Morris arrived suddenly to upset an established tradition: there were gradual innovations in both painting and sculpture which allowed Minimalism to come into being and assert its apparently radical style.

Other advanced sculpture was being made at roughly the same time by such artists as Dan Flavin, with his fluorescent light installations; Mark di Suvero, with his assertive tripod-like combinations of heavy timbers and industrial materials; and John Chamberlain, with his pictorial compositions, both free-standing and wall-supported, utilizing body parts from used automobiles. Likewise, Tony Smith, the architect-turned-sculptor, began in 1963 exhibiting austere, black work that subtly distorted mass.

Although Minimalism consists primarily of three-dimensional objects, the artists involved responded as much to the impasse they perceived painting to have reached as to modern sculptural traditions. By the end of the 1950s the dominance of reflexively gestural painting was losing its grip on the art world.

The painter Ad Reinhardt extensively criticized the excesses of his New

York peers in his ironic "Twelve Rules for a New Academy" of 1957. Two of the rules were: "No accidents or automation" and "No symbol, images, or signs." Although his square paintings of 1960 appear as allover black fields, they retain a configuration produced by variations of tonal value. Frank Stella's "black stripe" paintings of 1959 differ considerably from those of Reinhardt in that the stretched canvas is treated as an object which refers exclusively to shape and support.

The rise of Minimalism was roughly paralleled by that of Pop art. Although the two movements appear radically distinct, they share many essential features, notably the rejection of expressionistic devices in favor of elemental, clearly defined forms — often using repetition or exaggeration to call attention to themselves as conscious gestures. Minimalism differs from Pop art in that it chose not to refer to anything outside of itself, while the Pop artists commented directly upon the consumer society around them.

In discussing the development of Minimalism, aesthetic philosophy is as important as objective form. One of the seminal figures in this respect was Marcel Duchamp, whose vow to put "art at the service of the mind" and to reduce what he termed the purely "retinal" had a clear and demonstrable impact upon both Minimalism and Pop art. Duchamp's emphasis on concept rather than physical construct caused his influence to quickly supersede that of Matisse or Picasso on the younger generation of artists in the early 1960s. Whereas the Minimalists concentated on the conceptual process rather than the end result of Duchamp's aesthetic, Warhol capitalized on the iconography of the ready-made as well as the art of self-promotion.

To the uninitiated, Minimal art still continues to shock, or, more precisely, to represent much that is incomprehensible modern art. To those who maintain a commitment to modernism, Minimal art remains a pivotal system, having established through visual means as well as critical practice an ideology for subsequent artists to confront. From such "Post Minimalist" movements as Conceptualism, Body Art, and Earthworks to the pluralist styles of the 1970s, the influence of the Minimalist aesthetic continues.

*Donald Judd, Untitled, 1963. Wood and lead pipe, 21 13/16 x 45 1/8 x 30½". Collection of Philip Johnson.*

# DONALD JUDD

Donald Judd describes his works as "specific objects," which resulted from his dissatisfaction with many aspects of contemporaneous painting and sculpture. In a controversial article of 1964, Judd maintained that abstract sculpture in America lacked the indigenous character of comparable American painting, and that its progress could only be evaluated in terms of the European tradition. Judd himself commented, "The first fight almost every artist has is to get clear of old European art." He proposed an entirely fresh set of visual criteria three-dimensional constructs which nevertheless eliminated illusionism, composition, and allusive references. The extent to which Judd achieved his goal of creating an original art form is debatable, for inconsistencies occur between his theories and his art practice. In addition, Judd's work can be seen to espouse and not reject the history of art — the individualism for which he aimed is related to an established tradition in modernism.

Although he did not consider reduction as an aim in itself, Judd's pieces are reduced forms, simple and geometric. Reductive art in itself was not new. Judd's boxes are no more stark than paintings by Ad Reinhardt, except Judd's works are three-dimensional, larger and more colorful. Judd also may have looked to the painter Barnett Newman for his scale and use of bright and fairly basic colors.

His pieces sit directly on the floor without the addition of the base or pedestal of traditional sculpture. Though Judd believed "The absence of a base, as far as I knew, was

*Donald Judd, Untitled, 1967. Galvanized iron with green lacquer, 10 units, each 9 x 40 x 31". Private collection, New York.*

*Donald Judd, Untitled, 1968. Amber plexiglass and stainless steel, 33 x 68 x 48". Whitney Museum of American Art; Gift of the Howard and Jean Lipman Foundation, Inc., 68.36.*

completely my idea," he still mentioned his awareness of, and interest in, sculpture by Mark di Suvero and Lucas Samaras.

The ready-mades of the Dada artist Marcel Duchamp can be seen as antecedents to Judd's objects in their indifference to composition. Judd perceived Duchamp's pieces as individually immediate and whole, thus superseding the interference of traditional composition. Works by Jean Arp and Constantin Brancusi have also been credited by Judd as being whole, although he objected to their naturalistic focus.

Judd's aversion to hierarchical composition led him to reject that aspect of David Smith's sculpture. While both artists employed boxes and cubes as units in their work, Judd protested Smith's groupings and arrangements. However, Judd's wall pieces, composed of single identical units in vertical stacks and horizontal progressions could be seen to contain implicit composition. In deriving their order from mathematics, he avoids overtly aesthetic decision-making. Judd believed traditional composition to be "part-by-part play" with the main and secondary parts forming "collection of variations, slight through great," which is the way he characterized most sculpture.

Judd's works seem to refer visually to architectonic forms. As he noted in 1964: "These structures (dams, bridges, roads, etc.) are art and so is everything made. It is better to consider art and non-art one thing and make the distinctions ones of degree. Engineering forms are more general and less particular than the forms of the best art." In this sense, Judd's objects could be construed as referring to things outside of themselves by their association with engineered constructions.

Yet Judd asserts that each work does not mean or suggest anything other than itself: it just is. But by placing an object within an art context, Judd is necessarily implying that his work has an extra element — "art value" — he transforms the question "What is art?" to "What is the exclusive experience provided by a form of art?" The work thus goes beyond the idea of just 'being' because its sheer sculptural impact on the eye of the beholder stimulates in him or her a perceptual and complex questioning of Judd's original conception.

*Untitled* (1968) is a seemingly simple three-dimensional form, from which all evidence of the artist's hand has been erased. The steel and plexiglass define the box's shape and describe the volume it encloses: being a structural entity, there are no distinguishing features which might provide anthropomorphic references. Yet the materials also counter the piece's obdurate presence as a static object by taking up reflections of the environment as well as allowing a view into the box's interior. Nevertheless the complication of the piece's materiality results in a powerful sculpture statement, without taking recourse to the rationale characterizing the predominant pre-1960s tradition of sculpture, which enabled us to measure things anthropomorphically and thus ameliorate the self-definition of an art work.

Judd's wall pieces of this period involve a spatial notion different from that of the floor-bound work. They achieve object wholeness through the repetition of identical units, where the shapes of the

*Donald Judd, Untitled, 1966. Painted galvanized iron, 5 x 40 x 8½". Private collection, New York.*

boxes, and the properties and colors of the materials used ensure a sculptural effect. These systems have rhetorical value through unit-repetition. Some of the horizontal wall pieces introduce the notion of progression. As Judd has pointed out: "Everybody knows about progressions. You do understand there's a scheme there, and it doesn't look as if it's been adjusted to balance." He thus relies on the viewer's prior knowledge to guarantee that the piece is not deprived of its wholistic identity. Like Cage's music and the dances of Yvonne Rainer of the early 1960s, repetition or the rhythmic alternation of accents and intervals can be seen in terms of one continuous idea.

It is a testament to the integrity of Judd's idea that he has been able to make pieces which in their color, material, shape and permutational systems differ widely. The single concepts are transposed, not transformed, into existence, through the use of any material which can define them physically. And as the formal idea is not contained within the materials, Judd's use of media has demonstrated the limitless dimension of the ideas themselves. It is in this way that he has fulfilled his earliest statement, "work need only be interesting." This is sufficient.

*R.S. and S.W.*

# CARL ANDRE

Carl Andre's use of familiar materials, such as bricks, metal plates and wood, locates his work in the everyday; however, it is precisely this accessibility that can be infuriating to the viewer expecting more traditional "fine art" qualities. In opting to work with man-made materials in repetitive, geometric formats, he contradicted traditional ideas of uniqueness in a sculptural object. He rid sculpture of its emotive qualities by eliminating color and any signs of the artist's hand. And, beginning in the mid-1960s, he challenged the conventional vertical presentation of sculpture, with its allusions to monumentality and heroic stature, creating instead works that lay directly on the ground. Along with other Minimalist pioneers, Andre explored new criteria for art-making.

Compared to that of Judd, LeWitt or Morris, Andre's work is distinct in its emphasis on materiality rather than conception, perhaps because, unlike the others, Andre has always been a sculptor. He spent his early years making sculpture out of thrown-together debris and discarded objects found in dumps, producing odd and largely unsuccessful conglomerations. He also wrote "concrete poetry," which contributed to his use of geometric forms. Another influence on Andre was Brancusi's integration of pedestal and sculpture, which inspired Andre to work directly on the floor.

The earliest of Andre's mature work, produced in the late 1950s, consisted largely of columnar-shaped wooden pieces. About 1960, rather than cut into the wood, Andre

*Carl Andre,* Pyre *(Element Series), proposed 1960, constructed 1971. Western red cedar, 8 units, each 12 x 12 x 36". Gillman Collection, Jacksonville, Florida.*

*Carl Andre,* Steel Row, *1967. Hot rolled steel, 12 units, each* $^{3}/_{8}$ *x 15 x 20". Collection of Francesco Pellizzi.*

decided to use the uncarved blocks to cut into space. Lacking funds to realize all of his ideas at that time, he experimented with small steel blocks and drew proposals for his wooden *Element Series* (1960), which explored basic construction principles. Included in the present exhibition is one of his original proposals, here constructed for the first time.

Andre worked for the Pennsylvania Railroad from 1960 to 1964. In 1965, he exhibited in the "Shape and Structure" show at Tibor de Nagy Gallery in New York. Later that year, for a solo exhibition at the gallery, he planned on filling the room with timbers, but their combined weight would have made the gallery floor sag. Instead, he chose to work in styrofoam, stacking it in three different configurations, *Coin, Compound, Crib* (the words are building terms). As a surrogate for wood, styrofoam may seem a bit eccentric, but it reinforced Andre's concern for the sheer presence of material within a particular context, as opposed to an appreciation of a sculpture for its own sake.

In 1965, while canoeing on a lake, Andre realized that he wanted to make his sculpture level with the ground. His early, now well-known piece, *Lever* (made for the "Primary Structures" exhibition at the Jewish Museum), consisted of 137 firebricks placed end to end on the floor and extending in a straight line for 34½ feet. Not only did this piece, like its styrofoam predecessor, impede traffic around it, but it also afforded two views (one full, one partial), depending upon which room entrance one used. By the mid-1960s, Andre's proposition that sculpture had progressed from form to structure to place was clearly established, and it became a pivotal issue for all the sculpture that followed.

Andre continued to investigate place with the use of metal plates to make squares and long rectangles. These floor-bound pieces, which the artist believes activate a column of space above them, are meant to be walked on as well as viewed. They have a passivity about them, unimposing and surprising, even ironic, when one walks across them. Andre has transformed industrial materials into sculpture for the duration of the exhibition. But the process is reversible; disassembled, the components again become mere materials.

Andre's sculpture has the deceptive appearance of requiring a minimum of effort and a simple formula for its realization. The initial appearance is enriched by the complexity of references — historical, autobiographical and philosophical — that make themselves felt through familiarity with the works. The significance of his original premise, that sculpture can be the arrangement of the same repeated module — determined in ways suggested by the module — without the introduction of binding material (other than gravity), is reinforced by his continued adherence to and insistent exploration of this principle.

*J.H. and G. McC.*

*Robert Morris, Untitled, 1968. Translucent fiberglass, 9 units, each 48 x 24 x 24". Collection Philip Johnson.*

# ROBERT MORRIS

*New conditions under which things must exist are already here. So are the vastly extended controls of energy and information and new materials for forming. The possibilities for future forming throw into sharp relief present forms and how they have functioned. In grasping and using the nature of made things the new three-dimensional art has broken the tedious ring of "artiness" circumscribing each new phase of art since the Renaissance. It is still art. Anything that is used as art must be defined as art. The new work continues the convention but refuses the heritage of still another art-based order of making things. The intentions are different, the results are different, so is the experience.*

This quote is an excerpt from Robert Morris' "Notes On Sculpture," a series of critical statements written by the artist between 1966 and 1969. His purpose was both to set the stage for future developments in sculpture kindred to his own and to provide a retrospective glance that legitimized the aesthetic of his own Minimal work of the period. By redirecting the organizing principles of sculpture from the gestural and referential toward the unitary and non-imagistic, Morris achieved a radical break with traditional modes. In stressing the autonomy of pure form in literal space and its perception by the viewer, he reconciles the discrepancy between the abstract and the concrete. His reexamination of the nature and implications of three-dimensionality through the use of new industrial materials created an upheaval in the perception of sculpture.

*Robert Morris, Untitled, 1966. Painted plywood, 48 x 96 x 96". Whereabouts unknown.*

Morris' statement of sculptural principles eluded the grasp of conservative contemporary criticism. Older, established critics steeped in the referential, gestural, open constructions of sculptors of the 1950s found his philosophy antithetical. But the younger generation of critics grasped the rhetoric of Minimalism at once and made it the prevailing ideology. The change from the relational, compound idea to Morris' wholistic approach is evident when one compares his early plywood structures to contemporaneous work by John Chamberlain and Mark di Suvero, who continued the pictorial vein of the 50s. The "possibilities for future forming" existed for Morris in the vocabulary of contained, reduced geometric volumes — simple polyhedrons presented at first as singular forms and later as groups of the repeated, identical unit. By galvanizing physical properties of shape, volume, texture, materials, and light, and avoiding emphasis on any one property, Morris achieved a forceful unity of formal relationships that imparts to his work a presence and an immediately legible physicality. This indivisible coherence creates a powerful phenomenon that Morris refers to as "gestalt," or the perception of unified wholes. As he wrote at the time: "Simplicity of shape does not necessarily equate with simplicity of experience. Unitary forms do not reduce relationships. They order them . . . they are bound more cohesively and indivisibly together."

In an untitled grey box of 1966, Morris typically strips away all qualities extraneous to the sculpture's existence, presenting an object that encourages a simultaneous apprehension of internal relationships. The viewer need not move around the entire piece to know and understand it.

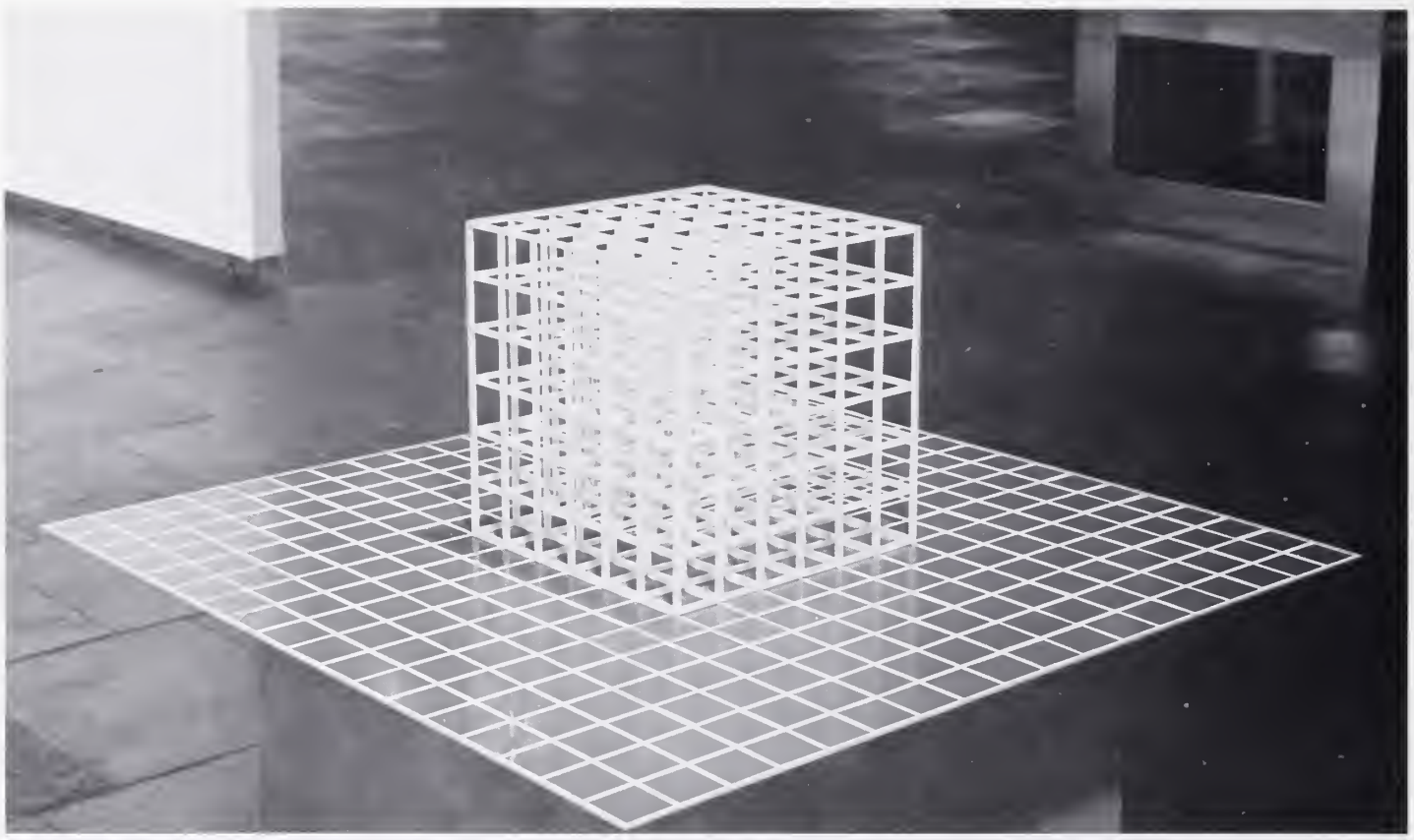
In keeping with this practice, another of Morris' untitled pieces of 1968 is definable entirely by facts evident in its translucent fiberglass construction. Translucency reconciles the contradictory issues of containment and revelation, emphasizing again the obdurate inseparable characteristics of the units as a composite whole. The forms make no claims to an "aesthetic" in the traditional sense of "beauty;" rather, they speak to technology as inspiration. The anonymity and redundancy of the identical and interchangeable units rival uninflected machine-made products, while Morris' innovative repertoire of material conspires to erase all evidence of the artist's hand. These forms of irreducible essence evoke no allusive image; they are what they appear to be. As Rosalind Krauss noted, Morris "reacted against a sculptural illusionism which converts one material into the signifier for another: stone, for example, into flesh — an illusion that withdraws the sculptural object from literal space and places it in a metaphorical one."

With the human body as the determinant of scale, Morris manipulates volume with careful consideration. By steering clear of monumentality in these nine translucent units, he avoids imposing a magnitude that could overwhelm the viewer. Conversely, he rejects a scale so small as to create intimacy and highlight separate internal relationships. Morris places his work directly on the floor to share actual space and gravitional effect with the beholder. Moving into the space of the sculpture and confronting the literalness of its existence, the viewer becomes the external element necessary and crucial to establishing its objecthood.

Robert Morris can be singled out as a creator of an object sculpture with a new, self-contained existence. Through a vocabulary of non-imagistic, primary forms executed in commonplace materials he removed art both literally and figuratively from the pedestal and placed it firmly into the realm of the everyday experience.

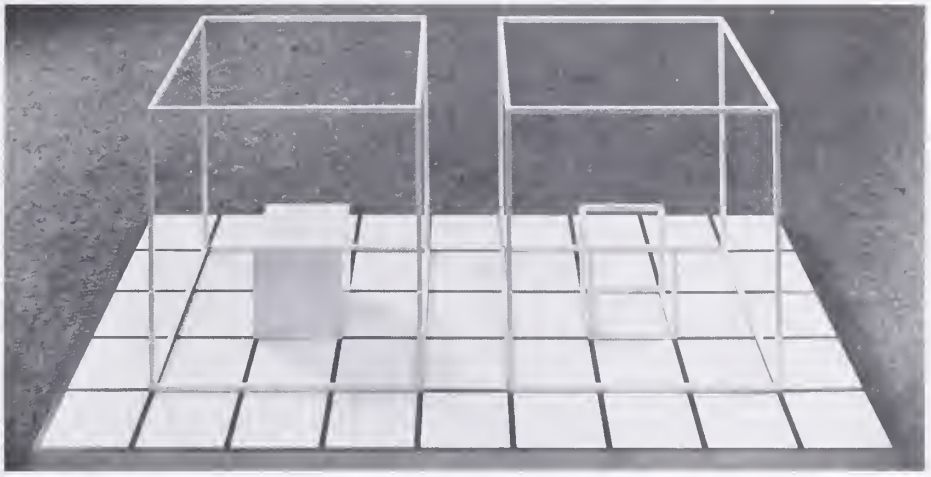
*L.B. and J.D.*

*Green Gallery, New York. "Robert Morris," 1964.*



*Sol LeWitt*, Untitled Cube (6), *1968. Painted steel, 15¼ x 45 x 45". Whitney Museum of American Art; Gift of the Howard and Jean Lipman Foundation, Inc., 68.45.*

# SOL LEWITT



*Sol LeWitt,* B8 A8 *(from Serial Project #1), 1966-68. Baked enamel on aluminum, 19¼ x 32 x 57". Private collection, New York.*

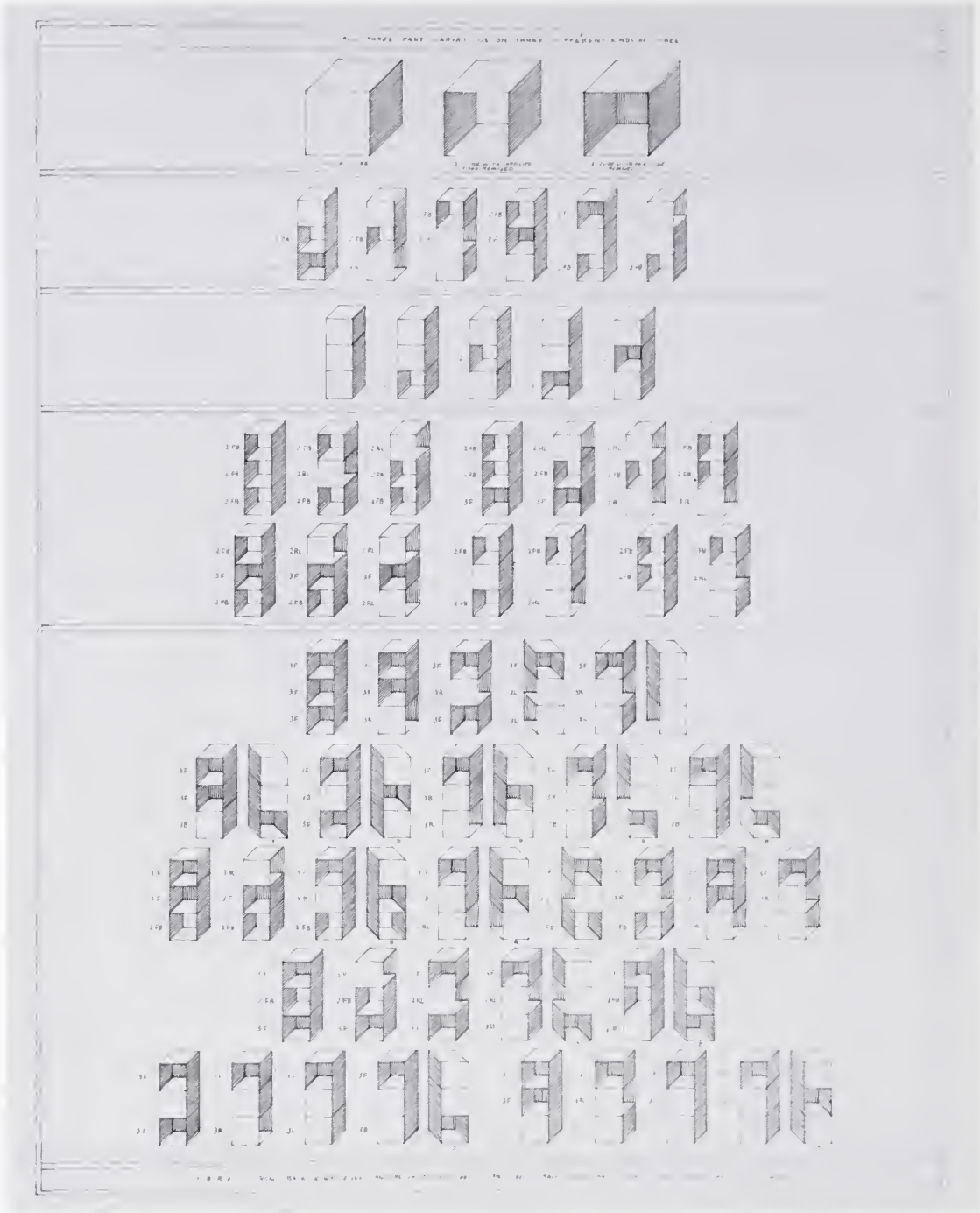
When is a Minimalist not a Minimalist? During the mid-sixties, Sol LeWitt helped formulate and communicate the Minimalist aesthetic. His wall reliefs and freestanding structures were quickly accepted as exemplary manifestations of the Minimalist style. Yet as the decade progressed, LeWitt felt obliged to invent a new term, "Conceptual Art," to distinguish his practice from that of Minimalist artists and from the critical assumptions which surrounded the movement. This change resulted from developments in LeWitt's work that made the ideas behind his pieces more important than the actual objects created to convey them. The absence of significant visual information, embodied in an obviously controlled object with undeniable presence, such as the *Untitled Cube (6)* of 1968, served to direct the viewer's attention toward regions more intellectual than physical.

LeWitt shared with the Minimalists the desire to eliminate all representational and expressive qualities from his work. His cubes were painted to conceal the wood grain and remove traces of individual labor. He eventually chose the color white for his works because he felt that black was "too emotional." Yet there is more to this purist reductivism and simplicity of form than a mere reaction against the self-obsession of second generation Abstract Expressionists. Minimal and Conceptual art were informed by a critical attitude toward the assumptions, or structure, upon which the creation of art is dependent. However, in LeWitt's work, this consciousness of structure evolved through an understanding of language systems—the mode in which ideas are both presented and generated.

For LeWitt, de-emphasizing the visual presence of his work was but the first step in laying bare the language of his art. Simple geometric units—lines, right angles, cubes—became the transparent vocabulary of LeWitt's art. As he stated in 1966: The most interesting characteristic of the cube is that it is relatively uninteresting . . . it is best used as a basic unit for any more elaborate function, the grammatical device from which the work may proceed." He returned to this idea in 1967 in his "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art": *"The form itself is of very limited importance; it becomes the grammar of the total work."* This analytic approach gave LeWitt the freedom to forge a coherent body of work without overt reference to traditional artistic forms. And thus, because the works generated their own artistic conventions, the form of the work became its content.

Yet however integral or interesting the iconic complexity of LeWitt's work, one must question its relation to the final object. LeWitt's grids and cubes may look temptingly like diagrams for Arnheim's *Visual Thinking* or Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations,* but if that were the case they would merely be illustrations and not art. Their seeming proximity to linguistic and metaphysical issues, as well as their distance, offers a paradigm of the way in which artists can use ideas as their medium as much as the physical objects they fabricate to engage their audience.

There is a further dimension to LeWitt's self-generating systems of primary structures. His choice of the cube as unit and the determination of the measurements and compositions of his works was absolutely arbitrary; these elements relied on no rational justification for their selection over other possible units, measurements, or compositions. Indeed, by the late sixties LeWitt was experimenting with works that carried out all possible permutations of a given set of variables—such as a set of constructions which displayed exhaustive arrangements of open and closed cubes. This process further eliminated rational



*Sol LeWitt,* All Three-Part Variations on Three Different Kinds of Cubes, *1969. Ink and graphite on paper, 28¾ x 22¾". Private collection, courtesy New Britain Museum of American Art.*

decision-making from determining the form of a given piece. Instead of any *one* combination of elements being the piece, *all* combinations of elements could be considered the piece.

An awareness of this obsessive and fanatical aspect of LeWitt's work prompted Robert Smithson to comment: "His concepts are prisons devoid of reason." And indeed, the arbitrary nature of LeWitt's systematic approach is as irrational as the obviously disordered aesthetic structures of Abstract Expressionism.

The marriage of rationality and intuition present in much of LeWitt's work suggests a rhetorical device — chiasmus, the coming together and holding apart of two mutually exclusive concepts or systems of thought. This tension is a major factor in the success of LeWitt's work, yet it is not immediately apparent. The subtlety of LeWitt's paradox of irrational order is such that although most observers consider his art the height of rationality, it may in fact be a magnificent obsession, one which mimics the structures of rationality to prove the indispensable and superior qualities of the human imagination.

*J.C. and P.H.W.*

## Acknowledgments

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We would like to thank the artists and collectors who have so generously lent works to the exhibition. Our gratitude is due to the Leo Castelli Gallery, Paula Cooper Gallery, Dudley Del Baso, Richard Tobias, and John Weber Gallery for their assistance during the organization of the exhibition.

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The Downtown Branch of the Whitney Museum of American Art, operated under the direction of Lisa Phillips, Associate Curator, Branch Museums with Karl Willers, Assistant Branch Manager, is supported by the business community of Lower Manhattan.

## Checklist of Works in the Exhibition

Carl Andre (b. 1935)
1. Untitled, proposed 1960, constructed 1982
Wood
4 x 3 x 3 feet
Collection of the artist

Carl Andre
2. *Steel Row,* 1967
Hot rolled steel
12 units, each ⅜ x 15 x 20 inches
Collection of Francesco Pellizzi

Donald Judd (b. 1928)
3. Untitled, 1963
Wood and lead pipe
21 13/16 x 45 1/8 x 30½ inches
Collection of Philip Johnson

Donald Judd
4. Untitled, 1968
Amber plexiglass and stainless steel
33 x 68 x 48 inches
Collection of the Whitney Museum of American Art; Gift of the Howard and Jean Lipman Foundation, Inc.

Sol LeWitt (b. 1928)
5. *Untitled Cube (6),* 1968
Painted steel
15¼ x 45 x 45 inches
Collection of the Whitney Museum of American Art; Gift of the Howard and Jean Lipman Foundation, Inc.

Sol LeWitt
6. *Drawing Series,* 1968
Ink and graphite on blue laid paper
11¼ x 11¼ inches
Private collection, courtesy New Britain Museum of American Art

Sol LeWitt
7. *Drawing Series,* 1968
Ink and graphite on paper
10¼ x 20¾ inches
Private collection, courtesy New Britain Museum of American Art

Sol LeWitt
8. *Fourteen Pieces in Five Sets in which the Cube with Two Opposite Sides is Predominant,* 1968
Ink and graphite on paper
14¾ x 20¾ inches
Private collection, courtesy New Britain Museum of American Art

Sol LeWitt
9. *All Three-Part Variations on Three Different Kinds of Cubes,* 1969
Ink and graphite on paper
28¾ x 22¾ inches
Private collection, courtesy New Britain Museum of American Art

Robert Morris (b. 1931)
10. Untitled, 1968
Translucent fiberglass
9 units, each 48 x 24 x 24 inches
Collection of Philip Johnson

## Photo Credits

Rudolph Burckhardt: pps. 4, 5, 12, 15

Geoffrey Clements: pps. 6, 16

Bevan Davies: p. 9

Robert E. Mates and Paul Katz: p. 18

Courtesy Leo Castelli Gallery: p. 13

Courtesy Paula Cooper Gallery: p. 10

Courtesy John Weber Gallery: p. 17